

**Advancing Connectivity during the Coronavirus to Ensure Support for Seniors
(ACCESS) Act (S. 3517)**

Senators Klobuchar, Casey, and Capito

Background

As our country continues to confront the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we must support the needs of our nation's seniors – one of the most vulnerable populations to this virus outbreak. According to the World Health Organization, people over 60 are at the highest risk for severe disease and death from COVID-19,¹ and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 8 out of 10 COVID-19 deaths in the United States have been in adults ages 65 years and older.²

In an effort to protect seniors from COVID-19 and contain the spread of the virus, nursing homes across the country have instituted no-visitor policies. While this is an important and necessary step to help keep residents safe from the virus, these policies have unfortunately isolated seniors from their families and health care providers.

ACCESS Act

We must offer flexible solutions for seniors during this dangerous and difficult time, including by providing new ways for nursing home residents to connect with their families. The ACCESS Act would help protect this vulnerable population from risking exposure to the virus by allowing them to remotely access health care and virtually connect with family and friends. The bill makes important investments in existing telehealth programs and creates a new funding stream to connect older adults with their loved ones through virtual visitation.

Specifically, the ACCESS Act would:

- Authorize an emergency supplemental appropriation of \$50 million for the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Telehealth Resource Center Program to help nursing facilities that receive Medicare or Medicaid funding to expand their use of telehealth services;
- Require the Secretary of HHS to share recommendations on additional ways to improve access to telehealth services in nursing facilities and alternative sites for nursing home residents during the coronavirus pandemic; and
- Create a program administered by HHS to provide grants to nursing facilities to obtain and use technologies and services needed to support virtual visits – helping seniors stay connected with their loved ones and families.

The ACCESS Act has been endorsed by the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations, AARP, Justice in Aging, National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, Long Term Care Community Coalition, National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, and the Center for Medicare Advocacy.

Please contact Elyssa Malin (Elyssa_Malin@klobuchar.senate.gov) with any questions.

¹ Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). (February 24, 2020). World Health Organization. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-china-joint-mission-on-covid-19-final-report.pdf>.

² Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Older Adults (Accessed on May 12, 2020). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fhigh-risk-complications%2Folder-adults.html.